

VZCZCXRO1784

PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHZN

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DE RUEHPOD #0240/01 2561532

ZNR UUUUU ZZH

P R 121532Z SEP 08

FM AMEMBASSY PODGORICA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0952

INFO RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 0080

RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA 1039

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PODGORICA 000240

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SCE AND EUR/RPM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL MARR MW

SUBJECT: MONTENEGRO PRESSES AHEAD WITH NATO ACTIVITIES

REF: (A) PODGORICA 217 (B) STATE 83856

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: An informal working group, consisting of GOM and Embassy representatives, has started regular meetings to monitor Montenegro's progress toward NATO (REF A). The group will consider, inter alia, GOM steps to make progress on the eleven priority goals laid out in REF B and accepted by the GoM.

A meeting of the group September 8 revealed that GoM has made the most progress on the specifically defense-related goals but lags in the civilian sector, notably information security and effective public outreach. The GoM has already initiated action to meet its information security goals, and we plan to address other gaps when the group meets on 6 October or in smaller meetings before then. End Summary.

Eleven Priority Goals: First Six on Track

¶2. (SBU) On September 8, in its first meeting, the informal working group agreed to monitor Montenegro's progress in intensifying its relationship with NATO, particularly in the 11 priority goals identified in REF B. The group also agreed to meet regularly, at least every three weeks, to review progress. Members also plan to meet individually on specific issues. On the Montenegrin side, the group is led by Deputy Ministers for Defense and Foreign Affairs, Drasko Jovanovic and Dragana Radulovic, with senior representatives from the General Staff, Prime Minister's public affairs staff, Ministry of Justice and Information Security Agency.

¶3. (SBU) The group identified six goals in which significant progress is already being made:

-- Make significant progress in destruction of surplus small arms and light weapons:

Thus far the GoM completed destruction of 1500 Strela Man Portable Air Defense Systems in June 2008. In August 2008, 17,940 Anti-Diver Mines were destroyed. The GoM agreed to provide the U.S. team with details of the ongoing weapons destruction projects as needed.

-- Participate in at least two NATO Partnership exercises:

Montenegro has already formally participated in one exercise, Combined Endeavor in May 2008, and also is participating in the planning conferences for several more exercises over the next year. In June 2009, Montenegro will host its first NATO exercise planning conference.

-- Prepare a NATO-interoperable unit, as part of a long-term defense reform plan, for an international peacekeeping mission:

The Montenegrin Armed Forces have organized two peacekeeping platoons, which have begun intensive English language and physical fitness training in Danilovgrad.

-- Invest in NATO-interoperable equipment:

Several Tenders are presently under consideration, and the MoD will provide DAO information regarding purchases that already have been made.

-- Continue to spend at least two per cent of GDP on defense

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The GoM team assured us that the defense budget allocations are currently above two per cent and that those will not change.

-- Participate in NATO activities identified in Montenegro's Individual Partnership Plan (IPP)

Montenegro is currently signed up for 48 IPP activities and has completed 29 of them (60 percent).

...But Major Challenges Remain

¶4. (SBU) All agreed that the remaining priorities need close attention.

-- Develop plans to achieve its NATO Partnership Goals:

Because this goal alone represents a sizeable collection of tasks, post recommended to the Montenegrins that individual meetings before 6 October would be more productive.

-- Implement the Law on the Protection of Secret Data and meet requirements of the Security of Information Agreement with NATO:

DCM met separately on 12 September with Jovanovic and the newly designated director of the Information Security Agency, currently a senior advisor in MoD. They believe they will be ready to request NATO certification of their facilities within 4 - 6 weeks. (Comment: The designation of a new director this week is itself an improvement, in comparison to the previous one who was not from MoD. He is expected to be officially appointed next week. End comment) Nevertheless, the agency itself still lacks a budget and permanent staff, apart from the director. It currently operates with temporary support from the MoD.

-- Make progress in addressing rule of law concerns, including legislative improvements:

The Ministry of Justice representative asserted that GoM has already made significant progress in reforms of the criminal justice system. He also said this process would continue in accord with a five-year judicial reform plan, inaugurated after passage of the new constitution last year. This includes an action plan, proposed budgets and indicators of progress. The MoJ representative also highlighted Montenegro's cooperation with ICTY and actions taken to resolve Montenegro's own war crimes cases. The U.S. side requested a briefing from MoJ to review the rule of law issues in greater detail.

-- Increase public support for NATO membership:

For a baseline, the group agreed to use the latest poll which shows 28 percent support for Montenegro's membership in NATO. The GoM has formed an interagency team to coordinate its communication strategy for boosting public support for NATO. Its efforts so far have been mainly technical, such as designing a website and billboards, and soliciting outside marketing consultants. Actual outreach has been limited to academic seminars and a NATO "summer camp" at a mountain resort. There are plans for future TV spots and billboards targeting mass audiences, but we have seen no signs yet that the GoM leadership plans a broader campaign to appeal directly to the public. We intend to discuss this directly with the coordinating team.

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-- Reaching out to NATO allies early and often, including, but not solely through the NATO Contact Point Embassy, to seek input and provide updates on the progress of reforms.

The GoM also assured us that the PM, MoD and MFA will continue to brief officials of NATO governments, as they did in the run-up to the Bucharest Summit. The Intensified Dialogue process -- reportedly started in earnest over the summer --also will facilitate regular and results-oriented communication between the GoM and NATO.

Comment

¶15. (SBU) Even at this early stage, the GoM members of the working group are acutely aware of the urgency of their task. Pressure is no doubt coming from the government's top leadership, which has made it clear that it wants to see concrete results across the board. The MoD and MFA are without question committed to pushing ahead full steam. We hope that the efforts of the working group, via its reports to the leadership, will produce the same level of commitment from other parts of the GoM.

MOORE